United Nations A/C.5/61/SR.18

General Assembly
Sixty-first session

Official Records

Distr.: General
5 December 2006

Original: English

Fifth Committee

Summary record of the 18th meeting
Held at Headquarters, New York, on Monday, 6 November 2006, at 10 a.m.

Chairman: Mr. Yousfi ..... (Algeria)
Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions: Mr. Saha

Contents

Agenda item 116: Review of the efficiency of the administrative and financial functioning of the United Nations (*continued*)

Agenda item 117: Programme budget for the biennium 2006-2007 (*continued*)

Enhancing the role of the subregional offices of the Economic Commission for Africa

Other matters

This record is subject to correction. Corrections should be sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned *within one week of the date of publication* to the Chief of the Official Records Editing Section, room DC2-750, 2 United Nations Plaza, and incorporated in a copy of the record.

Corrections will be issued after the end of the session, in a separate corrigendum for each Committee.

06-60299 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Agenda item 116: Review of the efficiency of the administrative and financial functioning of the United Nations (*continued*)

Agenda item 117: Programme budget for the biennium 2006-2007 (*continued*)

Enhancing the role of the subregional offices of the Economic Commission for Africa (A/61/471 and A/61/544)

1. **Mr. Zadi** (Director a.i., Office of Strategic Planning and Programme Management, Economic Commission for Africa), introducing the Secretary-General's report on enhancing the role of the subregional offices of the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) (A/61/471), said that it outlined new strategic directions for the subregional offices, a new institutional governance framework, a planning and programming framework and the steps needed to strengthen the resource base of the subregional offices. The outcome of the comprehensive review conducted by the Executive Secretary of ECA had been endorsed at the thirty-ninth session of the Commission/Conference of African Ministers of Finance, Planning and Economic Development, held in May 2006; the relevant revisions to the programme plan for the biennium 2006-2007 and the strategic framework for 2008-2009 had been considered at the forty-sixth session of the Committee for Programme and Coordination (CPC). The revised programme plan for subprogramme 7 would be reviewed at the forty-seventh session of CPC.

2. ECA had already begun to strengthen the subregional offices using existing resources. Additional post and non-post resources deemed essential to that process would be reflected in the programme budget estimates for the biennium 2008-2009. He underscored the vital role of the offices in facilitating subregional economic cooperation and integration, supporting regional economic communities' implementation of the African Union agenda and the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), and assisting Member States in their efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals. While the implementation of the action plan set out in the report was on schedule, the subregional offices would be unable to carry out their mandated core functions without adequate resources.

3. **Mr. Saha** (Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (ACABQ)), introducing the related report of ACABQ (A/61/544), said that the reforms described in the Secretary-General's report were designed to achieve a significant shift towards operational rather than analytical work and to increase the proportion of ECA resources dedicated to the subregional offices. Improving the information and communication technology (ICT) infrastructure and promoting the use of electronic means for the dissemination of information, enhanced visibility and outreach were key elements of the reform proposals.

4. The Advisory Committee appreciated the efforts of ECA to address the recommendations made by the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) and the outcome of the Commission's own review. The implementation of the action plan was already under way, with activities planned for 2006-2007 and 2008-2009, and ECA expected to provide the additional resources required during the current biennium by redeploying both staff and non-post resources to the subregional offices and increasing the level of extrabudgetary resources raised in 2007. The Advisory Committee requested that the budget proposals for the biennium 2008-2009 should identify a clear linkage between the requested resources and the mandated activities.

5. **Ms. Lock** (South Africa), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, recalled that, as part of the 2005 World Summit Outcome, Member States had reaffirmed their commitment to address the special needs of Africa and had resolved to strengthen cooperation with NEPAD by providing coherent support for the programmes drawn up by African leaders within that framework. Unfortunately, the revised estimates submitted in 2005 in response to the decisions taken at the World Summit had not reflected that resolve.

6. ECA and its subregional offices played an important role in coordinating United Nations support to NEPAD at the regional level. However, in its resolution 60/235, the General Assembly had expressed concern about the OIOS finding that those offices had a restricted ability to act as the operational arm of the Commission owing to the lack of adequate resources for core functions, and had therefore requested the Secretary-General to submit a comprehensive plan of

action to strengthen the subregional offices and to ensure the provision of adequate resources.

7. She welcomed the serious efforts undertaken by ECA to implement the OIOS recommendations. However, since the Commission/Conference of African Ministers of Finance, Planning and Economic Development had endorsed the reform measures in May 2006 and had invited the Secretary-General to support the efforts of the renewal and reform process by providing ECA, including its subregional offices, with adequate resources, she would have expected the Secretary-General's report to address that issue more concretely.

8. The Group of 77 and China appreciated the initiatives taken to reposition ECA and divert resources to the subregional offices to address the OIOS recommendations in the short term. However, the success of that enterprise did not depend entirely on the actions of ECA: the Secretariat and Member States would have to provide adequate resources to address the critical areas identified. While the Group appreciated the interim measures, it wondered why vital decisions on resources were being postponed until 2007, when the General Assembly would consider the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2008-2009, particularly since the Secretariat and the Assembly had not taken that approach with respect to other critical reforms arising from the World Summit Outcome.

9. The Commission's efforts to increase its extrabudgetary resources were commendable. However, mandated activities should be financed from assessed contributions, and ECA should not be expected to increase its reliance on voluntary funding for the implementation of reform measures. The Secretary-General must therefore take concrete action to comply with resolution 60/235 and the request of the African Ministers. Such action would be in line with recent proposals and decisions concerning other priority areas in which activities were heavily dependent on extrabudgetary funding.

10. Lastly, she said that the adoption of General Assembly resolution 57/7 had been an important expression of international solidarity and partnership with NEPAD. In that context, ECA and its subregional offices played a significant role in efforts to advance the development agenda. Unfortunately, there had been no real growth in regular-budget allocations for activities in support of NEPAD since 2004. It was therefore imperative to ensure that the development of Africa, as one of the eight main priorities of the Organization, received not only political support but also more concrete and visible action on the part of the Secretariat and the Assembly.

11. **Ms. Koski** (Finland), speaking on behalf of the European Union; the acceding countries Bulgaria and Romania; the candidate countries Croatia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Turkey; the stabilization and association process countries Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia; and, in addition, Iceland, Moldova, Norway and Ukraine, welcomed the action taken by ECA to implement the OIOS recommendations, as well as the practical results achieved thus far. She also commended the new Executive Secretary of ECA for his efforts to refocus the mandate and mission of the Commission and its subregional offices.

12. The action plan set out in the report was intended to support regional integration in Africa while simultaneously devoting attention to the specific priorities and initiatives of each subregion. The European Union agreed that strengthened partnerships and more active intergovernmental cooperation at the subregional level would help to create beneficial synergies for African societies and economies. It supported the proposed review of the use of regional advisory services in order to increase the correlation between those services and the operational needs of the subregional offices.

13. Some stages of the restructuring process would require continuous review and follow-up. That process should be conducted within the broader context of the ongoing discussion on system-wide coherence. Local and regional capacity-building required a realistic and balanced focus, and, as the Advisory Committee had recommended, ECA should continue to define the role of its subregional offices.

14. **Ms. Udo** (Nigeria), speaking on behalf of the African Group, underlined the important role played by ECA. Part of its mandate involved promoting economic and social development in Africa but, in order to cover the length and breadth of the continent, the Commission needed the support of well-equipped, effective subregional offices. However, to the consternation of Member States, OIOS had identified a number of problems and shortcomings requiring

immediate corrective action. While some of those problems might be rectified through administrative reorganization, others, such as the paucity of regular-budget resources and inadequate ICT infrastructure, were beyond the control of ECA. In particular, the responsibility conferred on ECA by Member States had not been matched with adequate resources in all areas, and coordination between the Commission's headquarters and the subregional offices was not sufficiently integrated.

15. The Secretary-General's report was welcome, but it did not fully address the provisions of General Assembly resolution 60/235, in which the Secretary-General had been requested to submit a comprehensive plan of action and to ensure that adequate resources were provided to ECA and its subregional offices to continue their support for NEPAD and the regional economic communities for Africa, as well as to ensure the full implementation of the recommendations of OIOS. Accordingly, she would like to know when the Committee would receive the additional information missing from the report.

16. She commended ECA for its efforts to implement the OIOS recommendations, in particular the steps taken to develop new strategic directions for the offices by, inter alia, refocusing their mandates and missions and eliminating duplication. She also welcomed the new institutional governance framework for the subregional offices, the subregional office-driven planning and programming framework, the improvement of modalities through enhanced partnerships and the efforts to strengthen the resource base of the subregional offices. Those offices had an important part to play in supporting the regional integration aspirations of Member States, but their role was dependent on the performance of ECA. In that connection, she expressed concern that, despite the interim measures set out in the report, and contrary to the explicit wishes of the Assembly, concrete action to address urgent issues had been deferred to the biennium 2008-2009. She would like further details about the reasons behind that failure to comply with the General Assembly's request. She also enquired as to the exact situation concerning vacancies at ECA and the subregional offices and asked for additional information about the collaboration between ECA and the Office of Human Resources Management. Lastly, she would like to know how the new strategies for 2006-2007 would be implemented in the absence of additional resources.

17. While the Secretary-General's proposals seemed detailed, well thought out and deserving of Member States' support, they could not be translated into action without the necessary resources. The African Group was confident that the Fifth Committee would take appropriate steps to ensure the implementation of its own instructions and address the lapses identified by OIOS, which should remain seized of the issue in order to evaluate the full implementation of its recommendations.

18. **Mr. Sena** (Brazil) expressed concern that the additional resources required for strengthening the subregional offices during the current biennium were to be provided through redeployment of both post and non-post resources from ECA headquarters. One of the most important findings of OIOS had been that the offices' mandated core functions were currently not supported by adequate resources and their operational resources needed to be strengthened. The Secretary-General's proposal was that the relevant reforms should be implemented "within existing resources" or postponed to the budget negotiations for 2008-2009. That was not the manner in which other reforms, such as the strengthening of OIOS and procurement, had been dealt with; his delegation had expected concrete proposals to be made for post and non-post resources.

19. He emphasized the importance of providing the subregional offices with adequate budgetary resources for ICT, so that they could be connected with one another and with the Commission's headquarters. Mandated activities could not be financed primarily with extrabudgetary funds; they should rely mainly on stable and predictable regular-budget funding. The Secretary-General should share with other regional commissions the lessons learned and experience gained from the reforms undertaken by ECA and its subregional offices.

20. **Mr. Ng'ongolo** (United Republic of Tanzania) was pleased to note that the repositioning strategy for the subregional offices was geared mainly towards refocusing their mandate and mission based on the promotion of the continent's integration and development from a subregional perspective. It was important to make ECA a more action-oriented institution by strengthening its presence in the regional economic communities via its subregional offices. He

was surprised to note, however, that the East African Community was not among the regional economic communities with which ECA sought to conclude a partnership agreement. The success of the East African Community was crucial for the realization of political and economic objectives in East Africa and the Great Lakes region, and he urged ECA to actively support the Community's integration process through its partnership agreements with regional economic communities in the subregion.

21. **Mr. Zadi** (Director a.i., Office of Strategic Planning and Programme Management, ECA) said, in response to the question posed by the representative of Nigeria on behalf of the African Group, that a significant effort had been made to accelerate recruitment and reduce vacancy rates at ECA. Support had been received from the Office of Human Resources Management at Headquarters, and a new Chief of the ECA Human Resources Services Section had been recruited.

22. **Ms. Udo** (Nigeria), speaking on behalf of the African Group, sought clarification from the Office of Programme Planning, Budget and Accounts as to how the concerns expressed by the General Assembly in its resolution 60/235 would be fully addressed.

23. **Ms. Lock** (South Africa), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, said it was not entirely for ECA to respond to the question concerning the resources requested in that resolution. She wondered why the entire issue was being deferred to the next programme budget. That had not been the General Assembly's intention in adopting resolution 60/235. The Office of Programme Planning, Budget and Accounts should provide clarification, at a formal meeting of the Committee, as to how the provisions of the resolution would be met.

24. **Mr. Moffat** (Office of Programme Planning, Budget and Accounts) said that his Office had received the report as it was beginning to prepare the budget for the biennium 2008-2009. It had determined, in light of available resources and of the situation at ECA, that there should be redeployments during the current budget exercise and that the identified post and non-post resource requirements should be deferred until the 2008-2009 budget exercise.

25. **Ms. Lock** (South Africa), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, asked why the approach adopted in respect of ECA differed from the one followed in respect of other matters before the General Assembly. The General Assembly had certainly not intended to defer action concerning the development of Africa until December 2007. She requested that a representative of the Office of Programme Planning, Budget and Accounts should be present during the Committee's informal consultations.

Other matters

26. **Mr. Kovalenko** (Russian Federation) raised the issue of the procedure for waiving the diplomatic immunity of officials other than Secretariat officials and the violation by the Secretary-General of the procedure requiring him to inform and consult the President of the General Assembly before waiving such immunity, specifically in respect of an Inspector of the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) and the former Chairman of ACABQ in 2005. The Committee had experienced difficulty in obtaining precise information from the Secretariat as to the procedure that should have been followed in those two cases.

27. His delegation requested the Secretariat to provide the Committee, at a formal meeting, with written answers to a number of questions. Which basic documents governed the procedure for waiving the diplomatic immunity of United Nations officials, especially those who were not members of the Secretariat, and what were the bases for waiving the immunity of the JIU Inspector and of the former Chairman of ACABQ? The representative of the Secretary-General had informed the Committee, during informal consultations, that in respect of the JIU Inspector the Secretary-General had not consulted the General Assembly because he had received a special request from the Swiss authorities regarding the confidential nature of the issue under consideration and because he was mindful of the need to preserve the Inspector's good name and reputation.

28. For what specific reasons had the Secretary-General failed to undertake the required consultations before deciding to waive the diplomatic immunity of the former Chairman of ACABQ? How had he determined that not granting such a waiver would impede judicial procedure? And on what basis had he decided that granting the waiver would not harm the Organization?

29. In accordance with existing procedures, did the Organization provide any legal assistance to its

officials, and was it required to ensure that those without diplomatic immunity were afforded the services of a lawyer? Had there been cases in which the Organization had refused a request from national authorities to waive the diplomatic immunity of a member of the Secretariat?

30. Had the Secretariat given any information or materials concerning the former Chairman of ACABQ to the legal authorities of the United States of America before his diplomatic immunity had been waived?

31. The Russian Federation reserved the right to ask additional questions on the issue at subsequent meetings of the Committee.

The meeting rose at 11.05 a.m.